



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Waukesha, Wisconsin Diversion Application

June 2015

The city of Waukesha, located in southeast Wisconsin 17 miles west of Lake Michigan, seeks an exception from the prohibition of diversions under the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact and Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement. The Compact prohibits diversions of Great Lakes water, with limited exceptions. One exception allows a “community within a straddling county,” such as Waukesha, to apply for a diversion of Great Lakes water.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been reviewing the city’s diversion application since the city first applied in May 2010. The city submitted its latest revised Application for a Lake Michigan Diversion with Return Flow to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in October 2013.



The city developed and implemented a water conservation plan to reduce consumer demand and minimize system losses. The city expects this plan to reduce the daily need for water by 1 million gallons per day by 2050. The city is under a 2009 Wisconsin court judgment to develop a permanent solution to the radium contamination problem by 2018.

In its application, the city proposes to divert an annual average of 10.1 million gallons per day and a daily maximum of 16.7 million gallons upon final water supply service area build-out for a population of 97,400 (approximately the year 2050). Under the proposed diversion, the city would receive treated water from the city of Oak Creek Water Utility, which is located in the Great Lakes basin and withdraws surface water from Lake Michigan. The water would be transported to Waukesha via a pipeline and distributed to customers. The city proposes that, after consumptive use, remaining water will be treated at the Waukesha wastewater treatment plant before it is piped and discharged to the Root River in the Lake Michigan basin. Water supply and wastewater return flow pipelines would be approximately 19 to 20 miles long and share much of the same route.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources maintains a website on the diversion application at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WaterUse/WaukeshaDiversionApp.html>



The city asserts that it needs a new source of water to address water quantity and quality concerns. The city has long relied on a deep aquifer groundwater supply, but depressed water levels in the deep aquifer have compounded a problem of high radium concentration (a naturally occurring carcinogen) in the groundwater. The public supply is supplemented by water from the shallow aquifer.